"[India's] most significant achievement since independence has been to demonstrate that democracy can survive in a poverty-stricken nation," says Sumit Ganguly. But "[n]ot since the sanguinary days of independence and the 1947 partition that created Pakistan has Indian society been so polarized."

India: Charting a New Course?

BY SUMIT GANGULY

The specter of irrelevance in the emerging world order haunts the Indian state. Mainly because of flawed and short-sighted policies, the country is besieged by a legion of problems, none of them easily solved. With the end of the cold war, many of the familiar moorings of India's foreign policy have been sundered. The nation finds itself adrift. If India is to play a role commensurate with its size and economic potential, its leaders will have to demonstrate considerable dexterity in tackling the new challenges on the domestic front and abroad. Failure to do so may well result in India's permanent relegation to the status of a crippled giant.

SECULARISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Not since the sanguinary days of independence and the 1947 partition that created Pakistan has Indian society been so polarized. The emergent division along religious lines poses an extremely significant challenge to the secularism on which the modern Indian state was founded.

Relations between the dominant Hindu community, which makes up nearly 80 percent of the population, and the largest minority group, the Muslims, who make up more than 11 percent, are arguably at their lowest ebb in the post-independence era. Hindu-Muslim animosity is not simply a function of "ancient hatreds" with deep atavistic roots, nor is it a purely "modern hate."[1] Relations between the two communities have oscillated over the centuries between harmony and unremitting conflict. Harmonious periods have given rise to syncretistic movements such as Sufism. Religious fanaticism—as during the rule of the Muslim Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, for example—has bred outright oppression and violent iconoclasm. The recent recrudescence of Hindu-Muslim violence stems from the attempts of various political parties, the right-wing Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) in particular, to exploit the historical record for short-term political ends.

Why is religious affiliation, a specific facet of ethnic identity, suddenly coming to the fore in India? Oddly enough, it can be argued that the spate of violence is an indicator of the success of Indian democracy. Because of the continued if fitful extension of the franchise, long-quiescent minorities are beginning to demand and claim their rightful privileges in society. The expansion of educational and employment opportunities through "positive discrimination" (affirmative action) programs has significantly improved the lot of segments of minority communities. The increased assertiveness and the slowly improving socioeconomic status of minorities have sown misgivings among many in India's dominant group. More than any other party, the BJP has sought to play on the fears and anxieties these developments have aroused among the Hindu majority, whipping up communal hatred and fomenting bloody conflict.

Party ideologues have deftly directed their ire against some of the real and perceived shortcomings of Indian secularism—which the BJP calls pseudosecularism. It points to the example of the government's handling of the Shah Bano case. In 1986 the Indian Supreme Court upheld a lower court that had directed that alimony be paid to a divorced, indigent Muslim woman, Shah Bano. The ruling contravened Muslim personal law (Shariah), which does not require the payment of alimony. Faced with an outcry from the more conservative Muslim clergy and some Muslim politicians, the governing Congress party of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi overturned the Supreme Court decision through an act of parliament. Gandhi's energy minister, Arif

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[1]The term comes from Suzanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph, "Modern Hate," *The New Republic,* March 22, 1993, pp. 24–29.

Mohammed Khan, a Muslim, resigned in protest, charging the party with focusing on the political arithmetic of the conservative Muslim vote.

More recently, the abject failure of the government under Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao to prevent the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a fourteenth-century mosque in the town of Ayodhya in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, demonstrated the erosion of the state's commitment to the secular ideal. On December 6, 1992, members of two of the BJP's more militant associates, the grass-roots groups Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Rashtriya Swayam Sevaks, attacked and destroyed the mosque (which had long been in a state of desuetude). The ostensible reason for the attack was that the mosque had been built on the ruins of an ancient temple that consecrated the putative birthplace of Lord Rama, one of the principal gods of the Hindu pantheon; according to BJP ideologues, the mosque had been constructed after the wanton destruction of the temple during Muslim rule.

Nothing can exculpate the BJP for allowing its associates to call for the mosque's demolition, which inspired militant Hindus to destroy it, but the political background of the conflict must be understood. The site has been a source of contention throughout the twentieth century. In December 1949, Hindu activists broke into the mosque and placed two icons of Lord Rama inside. Excited by the notion that Lord Rama had returned to his birthplace, crowds began flocking to the area. The local authorities, whose sympathies lay with the activists, refused to remove the icons, despite explicit instructions from Uttar Pradesh government officials. Both Hindu and Muslim groups then filed suit to obtain rights of worship at the shrine.

The inordinately slow pace of the Indian judicial system, coupled with the intractable character of the dispute, bottled up the problem for well over 30 years. In 1984, however, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad revived the issue when it organized a procession to Ayodhya. It is widely held that Congress party stalwart Arun Nehru, in an attempt to undercut the BJP, put pressure on a local judge to open the site to public worship. When this was done in February 1986, sectarian rioting ensued. At this point the Vishwa Hindu Parishad openly called for the destruction of the mosque. The Babri Masjid Action Committee, an organization of Muslim politicians and activists, responded by demanding the removal of the icons and the opening of the mosque for prayers. Blatantly courting the Hindu vote, Gandhi hinted during the 1989 election campaign that he was sympathetic to the militant Hindus' case. The stage was set for a confrontation that culminated in the events in Ayodhya and subsequent Hindu-Muslim violence in other Indian cities early last December. At least 1,200 people were killed and 4,000 wounded—most of them Muslims.

What Myron Weiner in his 1962 book on India called "the politics of scarcity" has also enabled Bharatiya Janata to broaden its political base. Economic modernization in the country has created more opportunities and resulted in increased social mobility. But this expansion has not been commensurate with growing demands for political participation and economic advancement; indeed, India's institutional capacity for dealing with these demands has been stretched to the breaking point. Consequently the BJP once again has been able to channel the frustrations of the Hindu population, now highly politically mobilized, against the "pampering" of minorities who allegedly have benefited disproportionately from the government's largess.

The rise of a group like Bharatiya Janata that proclaims an antisecularist manifesto is not a uniquely Indian phenomenon. In recent years what appears to be a global challenge to the secular state has emerged. The resurgence of ethnoreligious sentiment has gone against the expectations of both Marxian and Weberian social science, which had contended that the forces of modernization would efface ethnic identities. If anything, the reverse now appears to be the case—far from erasing ethnic differences, the dislocating effects of modernization seem to reinforce them. Anxious lest they lose their identity and become subsumed in the homogenized masses, members of ethnic groups often come together and seek to establish ethnic solidarity as a source of solace and belonging.

THE KASHMIR CONUNDRUM

The Bharatiya Janata party's antisecularist ideology has made it even more difficult for Prime Minister Rao's weak and ineffectual government to come to grips with a number of compelling problems facing the Indian state. One of the most intractable of these is the ethnically based insurgency in the Muslim-dominated Kashmir Valley in the northwestern state of Jammu and Kashmir. Despite applying considerable force over the past four years, the Indian government has not been able to quell the rebellion.

A range of insurgent groups currently operate in the province, covering an ideological spectrum from the fundamentalist Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, which wants union with Pakistan, to the notionally secular Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, which favors independence, to militants who would be happy with a modicum of autonomy for the province. The insurgency has no central command, and the various militant groups are sometimes at cross purposes. It is widely believed that the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen has received substantial material support from both official and private sources in Pakistan. Recent press reports in India suggest that a sizable number of Afghan mujahideen have also joined the insurgents. All the militant groups are well armed and enjoy varying degrees of support from the local population.

The government estimates the total number of deaths in Kashmir since the beginning of the insurgency at around 6,000; private sources put the figure at somewhere between 7,500 and 10,000 dead. The harsh counterinsurgency tactics employed until recently by paramilitary forces operating under the Home Ministry—including wanton killings, deaths of detainees in custody, and the occasional use of torture—have further alienated ordinary Kashmiris (although the government has now replaced paramilitary units with two regular army battalions and has taken steps to punish those engaged in rampant violations of human rights in Kashmir).

An examination of the origins and evolution of the insurgency provides considerable insight into the decline of political institutions in India in the face of widespread political mobilization. Kashmir's special status is enshrined in Article 370 of the Indian constitution. Among its many provisions, the article prohibits non-Kashmiris from purchasing immovable property in the state—with the obvious purpose of preventing non-Muslims from migrating to and permanently settling in Kashmir, thereby altering its demographic composition (Muslims form the majority population). Throughout a succession of governments in New Delhi, this central provision of Article 370 has been kept intact. However, unlike the rest of India, where most elections, whether state or national, have been largely free and fair, a number of national governments have engaged in electoral fraud and abuse in Kashmir. Political skulduggery has marked virtually every election in the state, made possible by the political quiescence of several generations of Kashmiris. But by the late 1980s a new generation had emerged in Kashmir—one that had benefited from increased education and greater exposure to the media and thus was far more politically aware.[2] Specific circumstances dovetailed with this general background to give rise to the insurgency.

The politics of Kashmir gave rise to the forces that finally opened the swelling reservoir of discontent. The Kashmir National Conference has dominated the political scene since 1947. Sheik Mohammed Abdullah, the party's founder, was incarcerated several times after exciting the wrath of the central government. In 1975 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reinstated him as chief minister of the state in return for a series of political compromises. In 1982 Abdullah passed on his mantle to his son, Faroukh Abdullah, a political neophyte who had been a practicing physician in Britain. The son not only lacked his father's stature and political instincts but was also perceived as venal and incompetent. In 1984 Rajiv Gandhi's government dismissed Faroukh Abdullah's government on grounds of mismanagement and corruption. There may well have been ample evidence of both, but given the low standard of probity the central government had long tolerated in Kashmir, such failings could hardly be deemed exceptional. Two years later the same national government decided to forge an alliance of convenience with the deposed leader and recall him to office. This had the effect of reducing Faroukh Abdullah to a mere stalking-horse for the Congress party in Kashmir.

Both the dismissal and the reinstatement had an alienating effect on the new generation of Kashmiris. They correctly deduced that the Congress party government in New Delhi had little or no regard for democratic procedures and niceties when it came to its attempt to obtain a toehold in the state's politics. But despite the Indian government's rank opportunism, the mounting sense of injustice in Kashmir might never have taken a violent turn had it not been for the 1987 elections. During this state-level contest, the Congress party, in concert with the Kashmir National Conference, systematically engaged in widespread electoral abuses, mainly to keep the opposition Muslim United Front from obtaining a substantial share of the vote. With the last avenue for the expression of political discontent effectively blocked, significant numbers of young Kashmiris turned to violence.

Apologists for the Indian government are at pains to point out that the insurgency would not have started up without Pakistani interference. Pakistan's role in aiding and abetting the insurgency is undeniable, but the Congress party government's actions encouraged external involvement. After all, between 1972 and 1989 separatist sentiment in Kashmir lay completely dormant, and no amount of Pakistani instigation shook Kashmiri loyalty to the Indian state.

The situation in Kashmir continues to simmer. For much of 1993 internal government squabbling has limited the ability of national policymakers to formulate a coherent strategy to deal with the conflict. Union Home Minister S. B. Chavan (who is in charge of maintaining domestic order and overseeing police, paramilitary forces, and prisons, among other things), has been at odds with the minister for internal security, Rajesh Pilot; though unable to conceive of any alternative course, Chavan has resented the junior minister's attempts to start a political dialogue with some of the militant groups. In September an Indian government initiative to rekindle the political process in Kashmir sent a group of prominent journalists, senior retired army officers, and administrators to the state to assess the people's grievances and discuss the possibility of a political dialogue with the insurgents, but the outcome is still extremely problematic. With divided counsel at

[2]For an extended discussion of Kashmir's special status and its integration into the Indian Union, see Sumit Ganguly, *The Origins of War in South Asia: The Indo-Pakistani Conflicts since 1947* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993). On electoral irregularities, see Ganguly, "Avoiding War in Kashmir," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 89 no. 5 (Winter 1990–1991).

the highest quarters, bureaucrats in the Home Ministry in New Delhi and in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, have been given little useful guidance. The status quo prevails, with its heavy reliance on various paramilitary forces and the Indian army to maintain a semblance of civil order.

Bharatiya Janata's intransigence has also made the government less willing to take bold steps—such as declaring an amnesty for the insurgents in preparation for meaningful negotiations on Kashmir. It is to the government's credit that it has steadfastly refused to acquiesce to the BJP's repeated demand that it revoke Article 370.

Finally, the present minority government desperately wants to ensure its own survival, and a great deal of political capital and energy are being consumed to that end. In late July the government narrowly survived a no-confidence vote in parliament. The Communist Party of India gave three main reasons for introducing the motion: the government's willingness to accede to the demands of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on economic restructuring, its propensity to consort with sectarian forces, and the "all pervading corruption" in its ranks. The final charge stems largely from the accusations of Harshad Mehta, a Bombay stockbroker who has been indicted in the largest stock market scandal in India's history. Mehta has contended that in 1991 he gave the equivalent of $371,000 to Prime Minister Rao as a form of "political insurance." The government, as might be expected, has denied the allegation and sought to refute it; whether or not the incident actually took place, dealing with the political fallout has proved to be a major distraction.

A COLD WAR WORLD DESTROYED

The Indian government's troubles are not confined to the domestic front. The end of the cold war has left India in a singularly unenviable position. Its long-standing quasi alliance with the Soviet Union has abruptly come to a close; clearly Russia is not impelled by the strategic imperatives that cemented the Indo-Soviet relationship. An array of benefits has been canceled. India can no longer rely on the support of a veto-wielding superpower in the United Nations Security Council on the crucial Kashmir question, and it has also lost its principal supplier of a panoply of advanced weaponry, and at highly concessionary rates. This has been a blow to the Indian armed forces, since much of their equipment is of Soviet origin. The paucity of spare parts and supplies, coupled with Russian insistence on payment in hard currency and India's tightened budget, has affected battle-readiness as well.

The changed situation has forced India to try to improve relations with China. This project, first undertaken during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure in office, has now taken on new urgency. India's desire for good relations with the People's Republic extends beyond the loss of Soviet protection. The 1962 war with China over the northern Himalayan border was a rout for the Indian military. Today the Indian forces along the Sino-Indian border are better prepared and better equipped than ever before. But India has had to reduce deployments in the Himalayas and assign the troops to various internal security duties, and these commitments are unlikely to diminish markedly in the foreseeable future. Thus maintenance of good relations with China—and the avoidance of border clashes especially—has taken on particular importance. In addition, India has sought to improve relations with the United States and the western European nations, albeit in a fitful and grudging fashion.

A second broad foreign policy consequence of the cold war's end involves the Nonaligned Movement, which India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, helped found. With the cold war's demise the movement has lost all meaning. Old habits, however, do tend to die hard. Some Indian proponents of nonalignment are desperately attempting to breathe new life into this now moribund concept. One of their arguments holds that nonalignment ensures a state's ability to maintain an independent stance in the conduct of its foreign policy. This contention is entirely unexceptional, but it can hardly serve as the basis for a multilateral movement. The second position—a more coherent argument—holds that the Nonaligned Movement can become a platform for airing North-South issues, and that India should take a leading role in this enterprise.

Adopting this confrontational role could have disastrous consequences for India. In fact, rarely has there been a more inopportune time for pursuing such a strategy. After years of isolation from the international economic system while in pursuit of an import-substitution strategy for industrialization, India has finally embarked on an attempt to open its economy to foreign investment. To that end it has also sought to dismantle the labyrinthine regulations that have governed labor practices, investment priorities, and the expansion of industrial capacity. Championing North-South causes at a global level would inevitably conflict with India's attempts at economic liberalization internally and externally. India would become identified with rigid positions on such questions as intellectual property rights at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations, which could well have a detrimental effect on foreign investment in India.

TWO GIANTS REGARD EACH OTHER

A hospitable foreign investment climate would enable India to attract significant investment from the United States, India's largest trading partner. A substantial American stake in the Indian market could provide the basis for an expanded relationship between the two

countries. The task of forging new ties will not be easy. If deftly managed and freed from the rhetorical excesses of the past, it could yield important benefits to both sides. Failure to do so could lead to yet another round of shattered hopes and bitter recriminations.

As India continues with its colossal economic liberalization program it will need multilateral assistance; American support for "soft financing" from the World Bank and the IMF will remain crucial. The United States also remains India's best possible source for advanced technology in areas such as electronics, genetic engineering, and space research. This argument holds despite the American intervention in July that prevented the Russian space agency Glavcosmos from selling cryogenic engines to the Indian Space Research Organization, a deal that violated the United States–sponsored Missile Control Technology Regime. Further, the United States is the only outside power of any consequence that can play a useful role in resolving the Kashmir dispute.

Currently, there appears to be gradual recognition in New Delhi of the importance of the United States in Indian foreign policy calculations. Several small indicators suggest a willingness to maintain a positive tenor to the relationship despite occasional discordant notes. For example, when the cryogenic rocket engine deal collapsed, New Delhi protested in the mildest possible terms. Also, the United States attack on Iraqi intelligence facilities in July not only elicited no protest from New Delhi but even received a sympathetic response; in the past, India's decisionmakers would have roundly condemned the attack in an expression of third world solidarity.

This is not to suggest that the Indo-American relationship does not have its pitfalls, or that it is currently robust. Differences exist, and the present areas of cooperation are limited. The principal divergence of views centers on the question of nuclear proliferation in South Asia. Despite pressure from the United States, India continues to insist it will not sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which it sees as discriminatory. India's argument is simple. The treaty prohibits countries that do not yet have nuclear weapons from acquiring them, but it places no restrictions on the nuclear states. Furthermore, Indian decisionmakers argue that India faces a threat from a nuclear-armed China.

United States nonproliferation policy, which had been fitfully pursued during the 1980s, has acquired renewed vigor at the end of the cold war. American concern about nonproliferation in South Asia stems from the incipient nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan. The United States is sensitive to India's concern about a possible Chinese threat, but concerns about an unrestrained arms race in South Asia continue to animate American policy.

The stated positions of the two sides appear intractable. New Delhi's protestations about the Chinese threat notwithstanding, a quest for great power status is the underlying reason for India's desire for nuclear weapon capability. To pursue the larger goal of nonproliferation, the United States will need to address this; failure to do so will only lead to deadlock on this critical issue. As Stephen Cohen, a specialist on South Asian security, has suggested, one possible option may be to offer India a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Senior Indian diplomats suggested to this writer last October that such an arrangement might be acceptable.

A second irritant in the relationship proceeds from the human rights situation in India. Faced with increasing pressures from their constituencies, various members of Congress are urging the Clinton administration to take a tougher stand on violations of human rights in India. These pressures are not likely to abate, but unlike with the nonproliferation issue, the Indian government can move with considerable dispatch in addressing this problem. The vast majority of the human rights violations for which India has been criticized constitute blatant infringements of provisions in its own constitution; addressing these lapses calls only for rigorous enforcement of the country's existing laws. Consequently the government can, if it so desires, easily deal with jingoistic sentiment that holds India is bowing to American pressure on the human rights issue.

As the end of the century approaches India stands at a crossroads. Its most significant achievement since independence has been to demonstrate that democracy can survive in a poverty-stricken nation. Three central questions for the future now confront the Indian state. Can it tackle the seemingly endemic problem of poverty through its new strategy of economic liberalization? Is it resilient enough to cope with the recent wave of ethnoreligious assertion and still maintain its secular credentials? And finally, can its institutions for making foreign policy as well as its leadership summon up sufficient skill, imagination, and courage to discard long-held shibboleths and effectively deal with a markedly altered world order? ■